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## ABSTRACT

In 1996, Indian Hills Community College (Iowa) participated in the American Association of Community Colleges' Exploring America's Communities project, which works to strengthen the instruction of American history, literature, and culture at U.S. community colleges. The college's action plan was initially comprised of three parts: (1) establishing a course addressing current identity and cultural pluralism issues; (2) creating workshops to acquaint faculty with these issues and assist the implementation of the issues in their classes; and (3) organizing a cultural fair, comprised of lecturers, artists and crafts people. Each of these goals was accomplished and more have been added. A Native American Studies course was implemented and has been popular with students. A cultural fair and a trip to a reservation were held, and the library's Native American collection was developed. Many faculty members have enthusiastically participated in the project, accepting the challenges and extra work associated with it. The two major concerns among students and professors were securing materials and ensuring their availability to students. The Native American collection at the library helped ease the first problem. To solve the second problem, more books were made available on the reserve shelf and greater restrictions were placed on their circulation. Two areas of the project yet to be completed are a Spring Cultural Festival and recognition and incorporation of other racial/ethnic groups. (HAA)

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# Indian Hills Community College Exploring America's Communities Progress Report

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In: National Conference on American Pluralism and Identity Program Book  
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# Indian Hills

## *community college*

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### PROGRESS REPORT OUTLINE

Established in 1966 when Centerville Junior College and Iowa Technical College merged, Indian Hills Community College is located in rural Southeastern Iowa. The two-year college serves a generally culturally homogeneous ten-county district and features two campuses. The main campus is located in Ottumwa. This campus offers classes to approximately 3000 students, half of which are enrolled in transfer courses. The college is also embarking on an ambitious outreach program which will put Extension Centers in each of the eight remaining district counties. These Extension Centers will be able to offer in-house courses as well as courses offered over the state's groundbreaking Iowa Communications Network's (ICN) fiber-optics educational transmission system. As a part of the ICN, Indian Hills is able to broadcast any of its classes live to any other college or high school in the state.

Indian Hills Community College's **Exploring America's Communities: In Search of Common Ground's** Action Plan was initially three-fold. The first part of it called for the introduction of a course (or, perhaps, a series of courses) which would address current issues of cultural pluralism and identity. The second part necessitated workshops designed to acquaint the faculty with such issues and sensitize them to the implementation of the issues in their classes, no

matter the discipline area. The final thrust was to organize a "Cultural Fair," which would bring expert lecturers, artists and crafts people to the college for students and community members to experience and appreciate. Our plan was to be annually thematic with Native American culture being the first highlighted.

We are happy to report that we have completed each of these goals and have added more! We have instituted a new course, Native American Studies, which we are currently teaching; we created a workshop entitled "Incorporating Native American Materials into the Classroom," which was offered not only to our college instructors but to the area K-12 teachers as well. And we have made arrangements for Native American performers and artists to be on our Ottumwa campus April 12, 1997, for our first annual Cultural Fair. In addition, we have substantially developed our library's Native American collection, we undertook in July a week-long student trip to South Dakota, camping on the Oglala Lakota Pine Ridge Reservation, and we have begun to put together a video which details Native American history and culture in southeastern Iowa. This will be distributed to all schools and libraries in the area when it is finished and will be available, free of charge, to any service group or individual who wishes to show it.

While we still have more goals to accomplish, we have had several major successes as a result of this project. The trip to the Oglala Lakota Reservation in Pine Ridge, South Dakota kicked off our project, and was an extremely worthwhile experience. This kind of direct experience with the culture certainly made a lasting impression on the students and faculty who attended. We also

received some very positive publicity about the project as a result of this trip. Another major accomplishment has been the enthusiastic participation of so many faculty members in the project. Many instructors from a variety of disciplines have modified their existing course content to include attention to Native American issues. Consequently, students have encountered the issue from a variety of perspectives. We firmly believe that the level of awareness concerning this issue is much higher now as a result of this project. The new course in Native American Studies has also been popular with the students. Because of this multi-discipline approach, there were many "conversations" occurring both in and out of the classroom concerning Native American issues. The general issue of American pluralism and identity has become the focus of most of our College Communication classes as well. With the adoption of a new text, Common Ground, students read several essays by authors from a variety of cultural backgrounds concerning American pluralism and cultural identity. Students discussed the issues raised in the readings, and all of their essays focused on some aspect of cultural pluralism and identity. Through these oral and written conversations, students explored their own identities and, we believe, developed a more empathetic understanding for the difficulties of various cultural and ethnic groups in our pluralistic society.

Because of the additional work that our project required of the Arts and Sciences teachers at Indian Hills Community College, our committee anticipated problems "selling" our proposal to our members. This concern proved false as the faculty readily accepted the challenge and the extra work that went with it.

However, discussions with professors and students indicated two major concerns. The first was securing necessary materials and the second was to ensure these materials be available to the students.

Instructors who incorporated Native American issues into their classes at the beginning of the fall term were initially limited in the sources available for student and faculty use. Sources on Native Americans were both limited and outdated. This problem was greatly alleviated by the end of the term as the library had added 99 new titles and have 54 additional titles on order. In addition, the library has subscribed to a newspaper and two periodicals that deal exclusively with Native American issues. These additions to our library represent a substantial commitment of Indian Hills Community College to our project as we were denied two grants that were to have helped finance these additions to our library.

These additions to our library, as substantial as they may be, have not resolved the concerns of every faculty member. The Psychology department claims that research concerning Native Americans in that field appears to be very limited. An English professor expressed pleasure with the new additions to the library but felt that in some areas there was a greater need for balance. Native American views were readily available, but opposing views may be lacking.

The second problem, having enough material available for students, reflects a willingness of both faculty and students to cooperate in our project. The number of instructors requiring projects and/or papers led to a "rush" on

available resources. In response to concerns of both faculty and students, two changes were initiated during the fall term. It is anticipated that these two changes, as well as any future remedies that may be proposed, will be continued through the school year.

Our first change was to recognize certain texts as essential to a large number of students and to place these texts on the reserve shelf. Our second change was to place greater restrictions on the time that books dealing with Native Americans can be checked out. It is hoped that these solutions will allow all students greater access to these resources as more instructors incorporate the Native American experience into their courses.

A main concern is to seek help in financing our project both to alleviate the financial burden placed upon Indian Hills Community College and to expand the scope of the project. We are waiting to hear from one grant application and are preparing to apply for another. While awaiting to resolve these financial concerns, we are in the process of dealing with two areas of our project yet to be completed.

1. Spring Cultural Festival (Native Americans)

This is in the final stages of planning. A tentative agenda, meeting areas, and participants have been arranged.

2. Recognize and Incorporate Other Racial/Ethnic Groups

No work has been done on this to date. This concern does need to be addressed soon enough to prepare and make arrangements for necessary additions to our library.

As previously stated, our faculty has embraced this project enthusiastically. Most believe that the issues involved in this project need to be addressed, and this project has provided the needed "push" to get them started. It has been gratifying to see how excited our colleagues have been about this project. Our vocal music instructor even composed special music featuring Native American poetry for the fall choral concert. But our primary focus and concern is with students' attitudes toward the questions inherent in this project. We believe that students are addressing what it means to be an American in several classes. For instance, in American Literature classes, students read Crèvecoeur's essay "What is an American?" in conjunction with an article of the same title written by Jerry Adler in 1995. Student discussion of the issues raised by both essays was quite animated. In College Communications I, the discussion concerning questions of what divides us has been quite interesting. Some students discovered that they harbored prejudices that they didn't know they had. Several students discussed incidents that they had experienced that made them feel "divided" from the rest of their community. Some of the most interesting responses were those in which students saw some of their own feelings reflected in the lives of people who were, on the surface, quite different from themselves. Several students saw that the concerns, ambitions, and fears voiced by people from many different backgrounds are really quite similar to their own. While it is difficult to measure changes in attitudes, the conversations about these vital issues have certainly made our students address issues they may not have considered before.





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